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M. FROIDEVAUX'S PARIS LETTER.

PARIS, November 18, 1900.

The Universal Exhibition of 1900 is closed, and in the first days of October the series of International Congresses, which had succeeded each other without interruption from the beginning of June, came to an end.

The work of these Congresses is of undoubted importance; but to speak of it with precision and with sufficient knowledge we must wait for the publication of the detailed reports. We already possess the summary of the proceedings at one of these—the Congress of Colonial Sociology—but the discussions of this body are uninteresting from a geographical point of view, and we should not speak of them in this place but for the fact that the United States have taken rank among the colonial Powers.

Notwithstanding the close relation which binds colonization to geography, this correspondence is devoted to geography, and especially to the geographical questions which interest the savants and the public in France. It is impossible to treat these without alluding to the different geographical institutions, official or private, which exist in France. I propose to explain the nature of these institutions, their organization and their work, and to begin with the Committee on Historical and Descriptive Geography.

This takes the first place, because it is composed of the heads of all the French geographical services and of some among the masters of geographical science and instruction. It was formed in 1885, up to which time there was no geographical section recognized in the plan of the Committee on Historical and Scientific Work, organized in 1834 under the Ministry of Public Instruction. In 1883 geography was admitted into the section of the Natural Sciences; but practical experience showed the defects of this arrangement, and the Minister of Public Instruction, M. René Goblet, established a section (the fifth) devoted entirely to the geographical sciences.

Under its first president, Vice-Admiral Jurien de la Gravière, this section of Historical and Descriptive Geography found itself charged with the publication of many original documents, as well as with the continuation of the work left unfinished by the Commission on Historical Geography of Ancient France.

Before long it began to make its influence felt among geo-

graphers, and this has continued to increase in a marked degree under the presidency of M. Schefer and M. Bouquet de la Grye. This influence is due: 1st, to the sound and impartial criticism of all the publications of the French geographical societies, and to the counsel conveyed in the printed reports on the subject of these publications and others submitted to the examination of the Committee; 2d, to the control exercised by the works annually brought before the section of Historical and Descriptive Geography in the Congress of Learned Societies; 3d, to the list of questions drawn up every year in view of this Congress and distributed by the Ministry of Public Instruction to all the learned societies of the nation.

Thanks to the sound advice of the Section, a number of provincial societies have abandoned the practice of printing the lectures delivered before them by travellers, perhaps for the twentieth time, and have applied the larger part of their resources to the careful study of their own district, producing in this way, within the past ten years, and publishing contributions of very real worth. The list of questions prepared by each Congress has had an analogous result.

The most important of these contributions are published, with the minutes of the monthly meetings of the Section and the reports of the members, in the *Bulletin de Géographie Historique et Descriptive*, an annual octavo volume of more than 400 pages, with plates and maps.

Edited from the beginning by the Secretary, Dr. E. E. Hamy (Curator of the Trocadéro Ethnographical Museum, Professor of Anthropology in the Museum of Natural History, and member of the Institute), the fourteen volumes of the *Bulletin* contain a vast number of articles on France and the French colonies, as well as on other countries, besides studies in ethnography and papers on the history of geography and cartography.

The Section publishes also a series of quarto volumes, such as: *La Mission Scientifique dans la Haute Asie*, edited by M. Grenard from the notes of the regretted Dutreuil de Rhins, and the *Mission en Indo-Chine*, of M. Pavie; the *Asie Centrale*, of Dutreuil de Rhins, and *L'île Formose*, by the late Imboult-Huart; *Les Séricigènes Sauvages de la Chine*, by M. A. A. Fauvel, and *La Sculpture sur Pierre en Chine au temps des deux dynasties Han*, by M. Edouard Chavannes. These two series represent a great deal of labour on the part of the members of the Committee. There is hardly a meeting of the Section at which reports are not presented by Messrs. Bouquet de la Grye, Maunoir, Hamy, Aymonier, Henri

Cordier, Grandidier, Levasseur, Gabriel Marcel, Emm. de Margerie and other eminent men.

The most important geographical occurrence since the date of my last letter is the meeting at Paris (Sep. 25-Oct. 6) of the International Geodetic Association. This, the thirteenth session, was under the presidency of M. Faye. Besides the reports on geodetic operations accomplished since 1898, there was read to the Association a communication from Mr. Gill, Astronomer of the Observatory at the Cape of Good Hope, on the progress of the work for the measurement of a meridian arc of 104 degrees in Africa, between the Cape and Alexandria.

Five degrees in Rhodesia and three and a half in Natal have already been measured, and the Association expressed the wish to see the African work completed by the measurement of an American arc of the same extent. M. Oudemans even proposed the measurement of an equatorial arc from the French Congo to German East Africa; but this was held to be premature. After an investigation of the causes of the divergence in the results obtained in 1888, and again in 1892, by the English and the French observers for the difference of longitude existing between Paris and Greenwich, the Association learned with satisfaction that the operation would be begun anew in 1901. Great interest was displayed in a communication made by Gen. Bassot on the measurement of the arc in Peru, undertaken by the Geographical Service of the army. Between 1736 and 1743 the Academicians Bouguer, Godin, and La Condamine measured an arc of three degrees at Quito. The preliminary operations accomplished by Capts. Maurain and Lacombe permit us to think that an arc of six degrees may be measured in the territory of Ecuador. This work, which will require four years of steady application, will be under the control of the Academy of Sciences.

Questions of oceanography are attracting attention, and a Society has been founded at Bordeaux for the study of the oceanography of the Bay of Biscay. It has already completed two series of soundings at the entrance of the channels of the Gironde and in the outer basin of Arcachon, and it proposes to follow a systematic plan of dropping floats in the Bay. This Société d'Océanographie du Golfe de Gascogne is the organization of Messrs. Charles Bénard and Camena d'Almeida.

There are numerous explorations in Africa, such as Lieut. R. de Segonzac's reconnaissance in southwestern Morocco, fertile in results; the march to the Adrar, under the lead of the unfortunate

Paul Blanchet; and in the French Congo, Capt. E. Jobit's reconnaissance of the lower Likuala and Dr. A. Cureau's three years' travels on the upper Ubanghi. Both of these explorers have published their accounts in *La Géographie*.

The Geographical Service of the Army has lately issued a good account of the Chinese province of Chihli, based upon the reconnaissances of Lieut.-Col. d'Amade, and M. A. Leclère has sent very important communications on the provinces of the Empire bordering on Tonkin.

In America M. A. Cerceau, who has been engaged since 1891 in exploring the wide territory of Bolivia, has discovered regions hitherto unvisited in the Chaco and eastern Bolivia. He reports the existence of rock salt, galena, gold, sulphuret of mercury, tin, graphite, kaolin and platina, which the Indians disdain as a kind of iron heavier than gold.

M. de Gerlache, commander of the *Belgica* Antarctic expedition, will start early in December for the Kerguelen Islands, to make an attempt at colonisation. His steam yacht will be accompanied by a sailing vessel, and scientific observations will be made during the stay at the Islands.

Of the recent publications on the French colonies the monographs on Algeria claim the first place, and one of these, the *Histoire de la Pénétration Saharienne*, by M. Augustin Bernard and Capt. N. Lacroix, gives in less than 200 pages a clear comprehension of the different phases through which the exploration of the Sahara has passed since 1830; and the authors, in closing, trace the programme of the future expansion of France in that vast region. Another remarkable book is that of M. Edmond Doutté on *L'Islam Algérien en 1900*. The author studies the Mohammedan religion as it exists throughout Maghreb, and especially in Algeria. He shows that the marabouts form the chief element and constitute the strength of the religious fraternities in the country. These latter are without cohesion and hardly wear the aspect of disciplined secret societies, and they obey with reluctance the impulses coming from the East. Several among them have rendered eminent service to the French, as set forth in the seventh chapter of M. Doutté's work.

Among monographs on the other French colonies particular mention must be made of the three volumes on Senegal, in which the resources of the colony are treated with thoroughness; the agriculture by M. Perruchot, the botany by M. Chevalier, and the ethnography by Dr. Lasnet. It must be said, however, that the physical geography has not been touched.

The same omission is to be noted in the handsome volume on *Le Tonkin en 1900*, by M. Robert Dubois.

Historical geography and archæology are not without representation. *L'Algérie par ses Monuments* is principally interesting for its illustrations, but a more serious value attaches to *L'Algérie dans l'Antiquité* by M. Gsell; and not less interesting is M. Al. Gayet's thin book on *L'Itinéraire des Expéditions de Jean de Brienne et de Saint-Louis en Egypte*—an excellent commentary on the photographs and sketches exhibited in the pavilion of the Catholic Missions at the Exposition.

Something may be said of a question much debated during the year. As long ago as 1827 the reality of Chateaubriand's travels in America was called in question, and recently, in two articles printed in the *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, M. Joseph Bédier has taken up the subject. He affirms that Chateaubriand made use of the books of previous travellers, and that it was materially impossible for him, during his short sojourn in America, to accomplish the journeys described. The Abbé Bertrin replies in the *Correspondant*, maintaining the genuineness of Chateaubriand's journey. I think as he does; but the matter will remain in doubt, unless a happy chance should bring to light the manuscript authentic text, not improbably in America.

HENRI FROIDEVAUX.